

RECREATION PASSPORT FEE PROVIDES POSITIVE IMPACT TO MICHIGAN'S TOURISM PRODUCT

- With the rollout of the new Pure Michigan campaign a few days ago, Michigan is in a position to improve its overall perception as a unique and exciting travel destination. This multi-million dollar campaign will certainly raise awareness of all that Michigan has to offer vacationers, including our beautiful State Parks. Seventy percent of Michigan's tourism market comes from within our borders. With tough economic times, Michigan's residents continue to look for good value and a "family" or "nature-based" experience when they select a travel destination. Michigan's State Parks provide that opportunity for young and old alike. The proposed **"State Park, Public Boating Access Site and Forest Recreation Passport Fee"** (SB 388/389 and HB 4677/4678) is a perfect solution in sustaining a long term funding mechanism for some of Michigan's most valuable assets and at the same time providing value for its residents.
- Michigan is a destination state, with many of our communities depending heavily on outdoor recreation tourism for their livelihood. For tourism to be a vital part of Michigan's diversifying economy, it is our responsibility to attract visitors with safe, functional and interesting facilities - from modern toilets to maintained trails.
- Tourism is the third highest contributor to Michigan's economy, with outdoor recreation accounting for nearly 41% of travelers' reason for staying.
- Currently, Michigan State Parks has an annual infrastructure improvement budget of \$2 million, which has proven to be wholly inadequate. Most of our buildings, water, and sewer systems are 40-50 years old and in a state of disrepair. For example, the 2008 bridge collapse at Warren Dunes will cost more than \$1 million to repair, and if not addressed could cost the revenue dependent system nearly \$650,000 in lost revenue annually. The 2009 collapse of the Interpretive Center at Ludington will keep it closed indefinitely due to lack of replacement funds. Virtually all state park infrastructure funds are used for emergency repairs. This package could provide \$17 million annually for preventative maintenance, emergency repair and replacement.
- This funding will provide Michigan with the opportunity to put its best foot forward, whether at a Great Lakes beach or a forest laden park that provides a quality outdoor recreation experience. Without proper funding the stewardship that has been the DNR's charge for our State Parks will only be further stressed. The Recreation Passport Fee provides a long term solution to a very real and ongoing problem. Without this funding State Parks will deteriorate to a point where no amount of money can fix the problem.
- More importantly, tourism destinations and activities like camping, fishing, swimming, downhill skiing or snowmobiling, and the jobs they create, will never be relocated or outsourced out of the state. As such, any investment made in expanding and improving the tourism product will always strengthen that state's economy, because those jobs stay put.
- People must have a reason to come to Michigan; it is a destination not a "drive through" state.
- State parks, forest and boating access sites, as well as local parks must be attractive destinations. Roads are the means to access a destination, so becoming an attractive destination will go hand in hand with improvement of the transportation system; it is not an either/or thing.
- Visitors to Michigan's State Parks provide economic impact on a daily basis. The 22 million annual visitors to our state parks generate \$650 million annually in the local economy. This economic impact is felt by communities big and small from the Keweenaw Peninsula to Warren Dunes.
- Michigan state parks and forest lands are important natural assets to the state. They provide low-cost, high quality outdoor recreation opportunities for Michigan's citizens and visitors, from boating access sites to outdoor exploration programs for kids. Additionally, the state parks and forests contain some of the state's most valuable natural features that deserve protection for the enjoyment of future generations.